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A weapon in the battle of definitions: a special rhetorical strategy in *Hánfēizǐ*

Abstract: Regardless of the actual views on the art of embellished speech of the author(s) presented by the collection of essays known as *Hánfēizǐ*, the work is well known for its formal intricacy and refinement. The composition of several chapters appears unique against the background of other transmitted texts of the Warring States period, and the same is true of some textual strategies serving to convey the presented ideas with intensified rhetorical appeal. In this study, I aim to identify one of these strategies, showing, on the basis of thorough textual analysis, how the sections in which it is employed are structured and how the given devices contribute to the construction of meaning. Relevant parts of the chapters 45 (“Guǐshǐ” 詭使), 46 (“Liùfǎn” 六反) and 47 (“Bāshuō” 八說) are analyzed here both with regard to their formal features, such as various arrangements of basic building blocks or transformations of metalinguistic formulae, and to their semantics, including the systematic lexical-semantic relationships of synonymy and antonymy. It is argued that not only overt interventions by the author in favour of “correct” definitions of selected terms, but also the very inventory of the terms itself and their deeper structural relationships and tensions reveal much about the author’s intentions and opinions.

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1 Introduction: Hán Fēi’s approach to rhetoric

Hán Fēi 韓非 (d. 233 BC), to whom the eponymous legalist summa *Hánfēizǐ* is traditionally attributed,¹ has been considered notorious as a sworn enemy of idle

1 The authenticity of the work has been disputed over the last decades, just as has the authenticity of every other work of ancient transmitted literature. For a detailed survey see e.g. Lundahl 1992, Zhèng 1993 or Mǎ 2010. The best up-to-date general introduction to the field of *Hánfēizǐ* studies is Goldin ed. 2012. Especially in the West, there has recently been a rapid development in

talk, useless rhetoric and sophistry, especially as represented by the adherents of what later came to be classified as *míngjiā* 名家 or the “school of names”. Whatever the history of the formation of the book as we know it today, this is borne out in many passages scattered throughout the text, as illustrated below. On the other hand, the work as a whole has been justifiably characterised as refined in style and sophisticated in its display of the art of persuasion. It also contains remarkable reflections upon the issue of how one’s proposal can be made aesthetically appealing and sufficiently compelling. These issues are addressed in numerous passages, not only where one would expect, i.e. in the chapters “Nányán” 難言 (How Difficult It Is to Talk in Public) and “Shuìnàn” 說難 (Difficulties of Persuasion). The latter is also mentioned in Hân Fēi’s biography in the *Shǐjì* 史記 and was among the more famous works composed by him.² Indeed, when we scrutinise his thinking on rhetoric, we discover that, in broad terms, rhetoric itself is sometimes viewed by Hân Fēi as morally more or less neutral, a technical means to achieve different goals. This is nicely expressed in Hân Fēi 14.5:³

[世之愚學] 俱與有術之士有談說之名，而實相去千萬也，此夫名同而實有異者也。

They all associate with the specialists in political philosophy and become famous for their conversations and explanations, but in fact they are infinitely removed from them: This is what is meant by being the same in name and appearance, but being different in actual fact.⁴

It must be admitted, however, that he definitely inclines towards the view that embellished speech is dangerous in principle, because in everyday practice it usually serves to conceal the vested interests of the speakers, to confuse the ruler

the views on authenticity and authorship in ancient China in general, the basic approach becoming ever more skeptical about the traditional attributions and traditional conception of authorship. Even in this light, *Hánfēizǐ* is still considered one of the least problematic compilations of the pre-Qín period. Most scholars seem to agree that a majority of the chapters were composed by Hân Fēi personally and many others represent his thinking very well. Zhāng 1992 defends all chapters except for explicit later additions (such as Lǐ Sī’s 李斯 memoranda) as authentic and as texts written personally by the historical Hân Fēi. Although this is another extreme, some of his points are worthy of (re)-consideration. Since the present article is dedicated to a purely textual analysis of the transmitted text, I will not go further into the issue.

² For a thorough study of the chapter and its importance in the *Hánfēizǐ* corpus see Hunter 2012.

³ The numbering is according to Zhāng 1992.

⁴ All translations of *Hánfēizǐ* are by Christoph Harbsmeier as incorporated in *Thesaurus Linguae Sericae* on-line. In the analytic part of the article, in those rare cases when I do not accept Harbsmeier’s solution I modify the glosses of the expressions and fragments of the text according to my own interpretation.

and to raise doubts about the positive law.⁵ The key questions are always whether the speech is of “practical use” (*yòng* 用), whether it is in accordance with “the real situation” (*shí* 實 or *qíng* 情), typically the real performance of a duty by the person who came up with the proposal, and whether it is compatible with the law. This is, incidentally, why one of the most discussed techniques of government in *Hánfēizǐ* is *xíngmíng* 形名 or “(confrontation of) performance and speech”,⁶ and also why the metaphor of a measure is pervasive in literature of this kind. Also very popular is the metaphor of a target (*dì* 的 or *yí* 儀, whether standing alone or forming a binome).⁷ The attitude that speech should be always goal-oriented is explicitly expressed, for example, in the following statement:

言必有報，說必責用也，故朋黨之言不上聞。(48.6)

When one speaks up there is bound to be a corresponding response, and when one makes an argumentative proposal one is held responsible for its use, so that partisan proposals will not reach the ruler’s ear.

It is revealing to look at the range of terms used in opposition to expressions centred on the words *biàn* 辯 “to debate, to argue” or *tán* 談 “to talk, to discuss” (which overlap, at least in this respect): *yòng* 用 “use(ful(ness))”,⁸ *gōng* 功 “real results”,⁹ *shí* 實 “reality”,¹⁰ *qíng* 情 “real situation”,¹¹ *xíng* 形 “tangible form”,¹² *dàng* 當 “appropriate”,¹³ *zhí* 直 “straightforward”,¹⁴ and even *yì* 義 “appropriate(ness)”,¹⁵ *shíxíng*¹⁶ 實行 “real behaviour, actual deeds”.¹⁷

5 The ambiguity of the author’s perception of “persuasion” is explained in great detail in Hunter 2012 and thoroughly addressed by Graziani 2012. The lines above should thus be regarded merely as opening remarks intended to sketch the overall background for the present study, not as offering a really balanced picture of the attitudes of the presumed author to rhetorical skills writ large.

6 See e.g. the study by Makeham 1990–1991 for more about the term, translated as “actualities and names” in a different context.

7 *Hánfēizǐ* 14.8, 27.7, 32.2, 32.17, 41.4.

8 *Hánfēizǐ* 15.1, 32.9, 46.6, 49.12.

9 *Hánfēizǐ* 15.1, 32.17.

10 *Hánfēizǐ* 32.16.

11 *Hánfēizǐ* 32.12, 44.11.

12 *Hánfēizǐ* 32.16.

13 *Hánfēizǐ* 49.12.

14 *Hánfēizǐ* 32.9.

15 *Hánfēizǐ* 37.12.

16 In fact, the preferred reading for 行 in such collocations would be *qùshēng* 去聲, modern *xìng* (registered as the “old reading” even in modern standard dictionaries such as the *Xīnhuá zìdiǎn* 新華字典).

17 *Hánfēizǐ* 44.11.

On the other hand, the concept of *biàn* is typically associated with such words as *wén(lì)* 文(麗) “embellished”,¹⁸ *xū* 虛 “empty, vain”,¹⁹ *wúyòng* 無用 “useless”,²⁰ *bùfǎ* 不法 “illegal” and similar expressions for nonconformity with the law.²¹

Then, of course, according to Hān Fēi, the people who engage in rhetoric for its own sake or just for earning their living are simply parasites and should not be tolerated in the state (scholars who engage in idle talk are classified with other types of public enemy as *bāng zhī dù* 邦之蠹, literally “woodworms of the state”, in *Hánfēizǐ* 49.18). It comes thus as no surprise that one can find a whole chapter focused on evils of elaborate speeches (ch. 41), introduced as follows:

或問曰：辯安生乎？對曰：生於上之不明也。(41.1)

Someone asked: “Whence does disputation arise?” He replied: “It arises from the superior’s failure to understand.”

Specialists in rhetoric are depicted as opportunists seeking only their own benefit and employing their techniques to mask their real goals, their incompetence and mistakes.²² In any case, they want to live an easy life without engagement in agriculture and war and to be promoted without real achievements.²³ These points are illustrated in the anecdotes about men pretending to carve an ape or a similar exotic object from wood,²⁴ about houses crumbling after having been made according to the advice of a theoretician who had won an argument over an artisan.²⁵ There is also an anecdote about two men quarrelling about their age, declaring to be sons of various emperors of mythic antiquity – “thus the one who had the last word was the winner”,²⁶ which shows the deep-rooted absence of faith of legalists in discursively established truths, and their well-known obsession with empirical “objectivity”. Under such conditions, rhetoric could not be but perceived as a useful tool for “men of law and techniques” (*fǎ shù zhī shì* 法術之士) to attract the ruler’s interest at best.

¹⁸ *Hánfēizǐ* 32.9, 32.26, 41.4, 46.6.

¹⁹ *Hánfēizǐ* 32.16.

²⁰ *Hánfēizǐ* 48.6.

²¹ *Hánfēizǐ* 15.1, 44.11, 49.18.

²² Cf. *Hánfēizǐ* 44.9, 46.6, 48.6, 49.14.

²³ Cf. *Hánfēizǐ* 32.14, 42.1, 49.12, 50.4.

²⁴ *Hánfēizǐ* 32.14.

²⁵ *Hánfēizǐ* 32.23–25.

²⁶ *Hánfēizǐ* 32.19.

In more disparaging chapters, masters of elaborate argumentation are viewed as traitors who collaborate with external forces.²⁷

2 A special rhetorical strategy in the *Hánfēizǐ*

This study concentrates on a rhetorical strategy employed in the *Hánfēizǐ* that is to my knowledge unique in the context of other transmitted texts of the time and therefore attracts reader's attention as a special trait of the work. In Warring States texts, one repeatedly encounters variously formulated definitions. They are usually formally indicated by such expressions as *yuē* 曰, *wèi zhī* 謂之, *zhī wèi* 之謂, *suǒ wèi* 所謂 or simply by nominal predication in which the *definiendum* is often marked by the thematic markers *zhě* 者, or *yězhě* 也者. They serve the purposes of the participants in discursive battles between various currents of thought and often also between different thinkers of the same current. Normative definitions, or, more precisely, redefinitions, of important terms belong to the basic tools of argumentation both in the dialogic and essayist styles. Also, from time to time, we do find appeals to authority in the form of references to how “the ancients” referred to a thing or behaviour.

This all is a part of the almost universal quest of ancient Chinese thinkers for “rectification of designations” (*zhèng míng* 正名). However, what is not at all common is explicit confrontation of words' meanings in the past and in the present, as in the following passages:

今之所謂良臣，古之所謂民賊也。(*Mèngzǐ* 12.9.65)²⁸

Such men that are nowadays called good ministers were called murderers of people in antiquity.

古之所謂仕士者，厚敦者也，合群者也，樂富貴者也，樂分施者也，遠罪過者也，務事理者也，羞獨富者也。

今之所謂仕士者，汙漫者也，賊亂者也，恣睢者也，貪利者也；觸抵者也，無禮義而唯權執之嗜者也。

古之所謂處士者，德盛者也，能靜者也，修正者也，知命者也，箸是者也。

今之所謂處士者，無能而云能者也，無知而云知者也，利心無足，而佯無欲者也，行偽險穢，而彊高言謹慤者也，以不俗為俗，離縱而跂訾者也。(*Xúnzǐ* 6.24.4–10)

²⁷ One is never sure whether the *wài* 外 means “abroad” or “outside the court” in a given passage; cf. *Hánfēizǐ* 49.14, 49.18, 55.5. It is quite interesting that we find a striking concentration of expositions of the emptiness, uselessness and outright dangerousness of argumentation in chapters 32 (“*Wàichǔshuō zuǒshàng*” 外儲說左上) and 49 (“*Wūdù*” 五蠹).

²⁸ The references to *Mèngzǐ*, *Xúnzǐ*, and *Zhuāngzǐ* are according to the ICS index.

The ancients called “scholar-official” those who exerted themselves with a generous earnestness, made the masses concordant, and took pleasure in riches and honors. Such men took delight in dividing and sharing. They kept their distance from offenses and transgressions. They were devoted to their duties and to reasoned order and were ashamed to keep wealth for themselves alone.

Those who today are called “scholar-officials” are base and reckless, given to villainy and anarchy, to self-indulgence and excesses of passion, and to sheer greed. They are offensive and insulting, and they lack any sense of ritual principle or moral duty, except when motivated by the desire for positions of power and influence.

The ancients called “scholar-recluses” those who possessed the highest inner power, who were able to obtain Inner Quiet, and who cultivated uprightness, knew destiny, and manifested in their person what was right and true.

Those who today are called “scholar-recluses” lack ability but are said to have ability, and lack knowledge but are said to have it. They are insatiably profit-minded but feign desirelessness. They are false and secretly foul in conduct but forceful and lofty in speaking about integrity and prudence. They take the extraordinary as the ordinary, behaving eccentrically and without restraint, out of conceit and self-indulgence.²⁹

古之所謂得志者，非軒冕之謂也，謂其無以益其樂而已矣。

今之所謂得志者，軒冕之謂也。(Zhuāngzǐ 16.43.11–12)

When the men of ancient times spoke of the fulfilment of ambition, they did not mean fine carriages and caps. They meant simply that joy was so complete that it could not be made greater. Nowadays, however, when men speak of the fulfilment of ambition, they mean fine carriages and caps.³⁰

However, an open polemic with the prevailing *usus* of the day is even rarer still. As far as I know, the only text in which such polemics with reference to the naming customs of people of the time can be found, is the *Hánfēizǐ*, namely in the chapters 45 (“Guīshǐ” 詭使), 46 (“Liùfǎn” 六反) and 47 (“Bāshuō” 八說), where not only the definitions of the *hoi polloi* are at stake, but also those of the political elite, on whom Hān Fēi, being one of them, focuses possibly more than any other author.³¹ Although the author considers various kinds of masters of debates, referred to usually as *biànzǐ* 辯者 “debaters, sophists”, but also *yóushuì zhī shì*

²⁹ Knoblock 1988: 228.

³⁰ Watson 1968: 174.

³¹ I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that all the three chapters are considered to be probably composed by Hān Fēi himself, at least as appearing on the philological grounds on which Lundahl, Zhèng, and Mǎ rely. It is not clear to me whether this fact could be significant for the debates about the authorship and structure of the book. Although I share the highest respect for philology, it appears to me that philological arguments tend to be inconclusive in this domain. To claim that a chapter was not written by the hypothetic author because it contains an expression unattested in other chapters of the book, yet attested generally in the language of the period, is quite different from deciding upon an approximate date of composition of a work on the basis of words for objects proved to appear historically at a certain date or of

遊說之士 “travelling persuaders” or *tánshuō zhī shì* 談說之士 “men of talks and explanations”, to be his mortal enemies, he actually engages in a similar activity himself. This is presumably to be seen as one of manifestations of the “positive” technique of *xíngmíng*, i.e. preserving the proper relationship between designations and things.

Below, I intend to offer a careful textual analysis of the relevant parts of the three chapters featuring a “definition” and a “counterdefinition” section. The passages investigated in all cases appear at the beginning of the chapters, sometimes accompanied by short textual blocks of introductions, inserted excursions and summaries. These are cited and referred to here only if they explicitly reveal otherwise implicit axiology of the argumentation from the author’s point of view. The rests of the chapters, sometimes quite extensive, are related to the definition-passages only loosely and need not concern us. Apart from drawing attention to the very fact that the author employs a unique rhetorical strategy and to the basic formal devices put in practice, I am interested in clarifying the lexical and semantic relationships established by the author in the text that make the structure of the discourse sophisticated and rationally appealing. On a more formal level I trace the different textual structures employed in the argument and transformations of the formulae. In addition, I examine the significance of micro-structural irregularities in the composition of the text, particularly departures from the otherwise consistent parallelism.

Chapter 45, “Guǐshǐ” 詭使

The chapter, the title of which is not straightforward to interpret, begins with a short introduction, ending with the statement that the reason why there is no constant order in the world despite the presence of the three crucial factors (“profit” *lì* 利, “authority” *wēi* 威, and “designations” *míng* 名) is that “what the leadership values highly and that whereby they might conduct good government are opposed to each other.” Paragraph I.A follows, accompanied by a brief intermezzo summarizing its message. Paragraphs I.B1 and I.B2 come next, with no clear boundary between them, except that I.B1 is a mirror image of I.B2.

I.A

The author first explains what he sees as the real background to the discussion through a functional definition of a politically important and beneficial concept.

words or meanings that are otherwise attested much later under special conditions – as Pines did in his article on lexical changes in the Warring States texts (see Pines 2002).

He then envisions a person acting in contradiction to it, claiming then that the people of these times use generally positive words to denote such a person:³²

| | | | |
|-----|----------|----------------|----------------------|
| 夫 | | | |
| 立名號 | 所以為尊也， | 今有賤名輕實者， | 世謂之 ³³ 高。 |
| 設爵位 | 所以為賤貴基也， | 而簡上不求見者， | 世謂之賢。 |
| 威利 | 所以行令也， | 而無利輕威者， | 世 ³⁴ 謂之重。 |
| 法令 | 所以為治也， | 而不從法令、為私善者， | 世謂之忠。 |
| 官爵 | 所以勸民也， | 而好名義、不進仕者， | 世謂之烈士 |
| 刑罰 | 所以擅威也， | 而輕法、不避刑戮死亡之罪者， | 世謂之勇夫。 |

As for establishing titles and designations these are the means by which one gains public honour. But these days there are people who regard titles as vulgar and performance as unimportant whom this generation regards as “elevated”.

As for establishing ranks and positions this is designed to lay the basis for low versus high status. But there are those who slight their superiors and do not seek audiences whom this generation regards as “talented”.

The exercise of superior authority and the conferring of benefits these are designed to insure that ordinances are carried out. But those who provide no benefits and who make light of higher authorities this generation calls “powerful”.

The laws and ordinances are designed for the conduct of good government. But those who do not follow the laws and ordinances but practise what they privately regard as good, these the world calls “loyal”.

Offices and ranks are designed to encourage the people. But those who are eager for fame and do not advance in office the world calls “illustrious freemen”.

Punishments and fines are designed to enable one to freely deploy one’s higher authority. But criminals who despise the law and do not avoid punishment and death the world calls “brave men”.

The core structure is: 1) the institution 2) is the means by which 3) a positive effect is achieved, but 4) those who contradict/oppose it 5) are called by the people 6) to be (positive) ADJ/N.

³² It is explicitly expressed in the closing summary of the paragraph: 常貴其所以亂，而賤其所以治，是故下之所欲，常與上之所以為治相詭也。‘They [= superiors] consistently value highly what brings political chaos and they assign little value to what brings good government. That is why what the subjects have a desire for is consistently in conflict with that whereby the leadership governs well.’

³³ The character 之 is missing in the *Qiándào* 乾道 edition; it is supplied according to the *Zhào Yòngxián’s* 趙用賢 edition. For a brief summary of extant versions of the text of *Hánfēizǐ* see e.g. Zhāng 1993: 6–10. The *Qiándào* edition, originally from 1165, no longer extant and accessible only in 19th century reproductions, is the earliest version of the text we dispose of, and it is usually used as the basic text by collators and commentators.

³⁴ The character 世 is missing in the *Qiándào* edition; it is supplied according to the *Zhào Yòngxián’s* edition.

Formally, the basic building blocks are the functional definitions expressed by a nominal predicate with the relative construction *suǒyǐ* 所以 “the X by which” and the predicate expressing the function of the respective institution, and the final particle *yě* 也 (“is”). The adversative-concessive relationship is usually marked by the conjunction *ér* 而. The *persons* in question are pronominalised with *zhě* 者 “those who”, and their negation of the concepts is either expressed by a description of such activity, or by a word such as *jiàn* 賤 “to depreciate”, *wú* 無 “to not know anything like”, *qīng* 輕 “to make light of”, *bùcóng* 不從 “to not follow”, or *bùbì* 不避 “to not avoid”, with an object lexically echoing the institution (*míng* 名 “titles” of *míng hào* 名號 “titles and designations”, *lì* 利 “benefits > motivation” and *wēi* 威 “(awe >) authority > deterrence” of *lìwēi* 利威 “motivation and deterrence”, the whole *fǎlìng* 法令 “laws and ordinances”, and *xíng* 刑 “punishments” of *xíng fá* 刑罰 “punishments and fines”). The formula *shì wèi zhī* 世謂之 is used to convey the meaning “the [people of the] present times call them”. Most of the terms, the usage of which is criticised, are adjectives; only the last two are clearly nouns. Although one could argue that the adjectives are nominalised (“the ADJ ones”), which is a regular process in Classical Chinese,³⁵ the change is obvious here.

The whole paragraph is introduced by *fú* 夫, usually translated as “as for”. It is interesting that the first two names of institutions are preceded by a verb (*lì* 立, *shè* 設, both “to establish, to install”), which violates the overall symmetry. The same is true of *jīn yǒu* 今有 in the first line instead of *ér* 而. In general, this and the next paragraphs in this section present a much less regular structure than the following ones in the chapters 46 and 47, lacking such strict parallelism. Here, we encounter various quickly changing rhythmical and syntactic patterns; the building blocks are of uneven length. Under these circumstances it would not be as reasonable as is the case elsewhere to propose emendations purely on the basis of parallelism.

The institutions all belong to the key legalist institutions, and there are close semantic affinities between some of them, such as *juéwèi* 爵位 “ranks and positions” and *guānjúé* 官爵 “offices and ranks”, and to a certain degree also *míng hào* 名號, if understood as “official titles”,³⁶ and also between *wēilì* 威利 “authority = deterrence and profit = motivation” and *xíng fá* 刑罰 “punishments”. The functions of the respective institutions (all verb-object constructions, *wéi zūn* 為尊 “to

³⁵ Cf. Zádrapa 2011: 102–103.

³⁶ This is not unequivocal. Zhāng (1993: 947) argues that it means rather the ruler’s title and position, precisely because otherwise there would be duplicity in the paragraph. Given the other overlaps, this argument is not as compelling as it could appear in another context. Chén (2000: 990) has the same reading as Harbsmeier.

gain public honour”, *wéi jiànguì jī* 為賤貴基 “lay the basis for low versus high status”, *xíng lìng* 行令 “to insure that ordinances are carried out”, *wéi zhì* 為治 “to practice good government”, *quàn mín* 勸民 “to encourage the people”, *shàn wēi* 擅威 “to freely deploy one’s higher authority”) are all conceived as generally positive.

I.B1

In this passage, the author chooses a similar approach: he presents a situation clearly seen as desirable both by him and in general, and then states the mistaken negative assessment of the situation by the people of these times:

今下而聽其上，上之所急也，

Now that the subjects should obey their superiors is something which the superiors eagerly desire;

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| 而惇慤純信、用心怯言， | 則謂之窳。 |
| 守法固、聽令審， | 則謂之愚。 |
| 敬上畏罪， | 則謂之怯。 |
| 言時節，行中適， | 則謂之不肖。 |
| 無二心私學 ³⁷ ，聽吏從教者， | 則謂之陋。 |

But those who are generous and diligent, pure and reliable, who give their very best and reticent in speaking up, these are called “slight”.³⁸

Those who are staunch in upholding the law and meticulous in obeying ordinances, they are called “stupid”.

Those who respect their superiors and fear crime, they are called “pusillanimous”.

Those who speak of timeliness and proper season and whose actions are moderate and appropriate, these are called “incompetent”.

Those who are without divided allegiances and selfish intellectual pursuits but listen to minor officials and follow their instructions these are called “vulgar and ignorant”.

As we can see, the original background of the institutions presented as beneficial disappears here. The implicitly positive behaviour is presented as a statement in

³⁷ In the *Qíándào* edition, there is the character *lì* 吏 after *xué* 學; it is removed according to the *Dàozàng* 道藏 edition.

³⁸ The meaning of the word *jù* 窳, “poor” in modern dictionaries, is not entirely clear in this particular sentence. Commentators refer to the glosses in the *Cāng Jié piān* 倉頡篇 preserved in the *Yīqièjīng yīnyì* 一切經音義 by Huilín 慧琳 (737–820): “無財備禮曰窳” “if one does not have enough wealth to provide for rites, one is called *jù*” (this gloss is also adopted by Wáng Lì et al. 2000), and *Shìmíng* 釋名: 窳數, 猶局縮 “*jùshù* [*groq-sroq-s according to Baxter-Sagart] is like *jùsuō* [*g(r)ok-sruk], i.e. withdrawn” (which is, however, a paranomastic gloss to an onomatopoeic binome, not to the isolated word *jù*). Therefore they interpret it tentatively as “poor to the degree one is not able to behave in accordance with the rites → rude” (see Chén 2000: 989), or “reserved, withdrawn”, or combine both meanings.

the form of a sentence, with one exception in the last line, where the pronoun *zhě* 者 suddenly shows up. Again, it is possible to dispute about the categorical meaning of the two sides of the equation. The right side is represented by adjectives, which none the less can be theoretically nominalised; the left side is mostly represented by sentences, which usually do not undergo unmarked nominalisation. Under these circumstances, it is better to take the text at face value and to interpret the structure in the sense “if they do this and this, then [the people] call them such and such”, with a conspicuous irregularity in the last line.

We can also observe that the original 世謂之 turns into *zé wèi zhī* 則謂之 “then [they] call them ...”.

I.B2

As mentioned above, this is an antithetical passage to I.B1, with implicitly undesirable attitudes being called positive by the people:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 難致 | 謂之正。 |
| 難予 | 謂之廉。 |
| 難禁 | 謂之齊。 |
| 有令不聽從 | 謂之勇。 |
| 無利於上 | 謂之愿。 |
| 少欲 ³⁹ 寬惠行德 | 謂之仁。 |
| 重厚自尊 | 謂之長者。 |
| 私學成群 | 謂之師徒。 |
| 閑靜安居 | 謂之有思。 |
| 損仁逐利 | 謂之疾。 |
| 險躁佻 ⁴⁰ 反覆 | 謂之智。 |
| 先為人而後自為，類名號，言 ⁴¹ 汎愛天下， | 謂之聖。 |
| 言大本稱而不可用 ⁴² ，行而乖於世者， | 謂之大人。 |
| 賤爵祿，不撓上者， | 謂之傑。 |

39 Some propose deletion of *shǎo yù* 少欲 because of the prevailing tetrasyllabic rhythm and a certain semantic discrepancy between this expression and the rest – “to have few desires” is not necessarily associated with “being generous” (see Chén 2000: 990).

40 The unpaired character *tiāo* 佻 arouses suspicion – some suggest to delete it, some to complement it with another character (such as *qiǎo* 巧), or even to rearrange the sentences (see Chén 2000: 990).

41 The position of the character *yán* 言 is unclear – some want to see it at the end of the previous clause, some in this position, some suggest it is a mistake or that something is missing in this line (see Chén 2000: 990).

42 The structure of the sentence is not clear. Some punctuate after *běn* 本, assuming a [Verb-Object] structure for *yán dà běn* 言大本, some after *chēng/chèn* 稱, parsing *yán dà běn chēng* 言大本稱 as [Subject-Verb-Subject-Verb] (and still some others would like to see *běn* 本 as an orthographic mistake for *bù* 不). Chén (2000: 990) suggests that *běn* 本 [*C.ppəŋ] is a phonetic loan for *fán* 繁 [*bar, later > *ban]; according to the Baxter-Sagart reconstruction, the difference

Those who raise objections⁴³ against summons to high office, these are called “straight”.
 Those who raise objections against official gifts, these are called “sure”.
 Those who raise objections against prohibitions, these are called “egalitarian”.
 Those who do not obey ordinances are called “courageous”.
 Those who are of no benefit to the leadership are called “diligent and sincere”.
 Those who have few desires, are charitable and are magnanimous in action are called “kindly”.
 Those who have great influence and high self-esteem are called “distinguished citizens”.
 Those who engage in selfish private study and form gangs are called “followers of a master”.
 Those who relax and dwell in peace are called “thoughtful people”.
 Those who pursue profit at the expense of kindliness are called “fast”.
 Those who are garrulous busybodies, frivolous and fickle are called “intelligent”.
 Those who first act for others in order thereafter to act in their own interest, who regard all ranks as equal, who propose that one should universally love all in the world, these are called “sages”.
 Those who speak up on great fundamental matters, who get praised but cannot be used, whose actions run counter to their times, these are called “great men”.
 Those who regard ranks and stipends as worthless and do not bend before the leadership are called “heroic”.

Some further modifications are present in this passage. The *zé* 則 “then” of the formula disappears, leaving only *wèi zhī* 謂之 “[they] call them”. In the last two lines, the pronoun *zhě* 者 suddenly shows up again, irrespective of the fact that it is in a smaller block of three lines. Most of the discussed designations are again adjectives, but there are heterogeneities. First, we have a block of the terms *zhǎngzhě* 長者 “(older) distinguished citizen”, *shítú* 師徒 “follower of a master”, *yǒusī* 有思 “to have deep thoughts”. In the context, the last expression can be indeed understood as a nominalization (of the exocentric type *yǒusī* 有司 “to have something to take charge of” > “[those] in charge of something” > “authorities”) and translated in accordance with Harbsmeier’s “thoughtful people”. The second block, closing the paragraph, consists of three designations of capable men – *shèngrén* 聖人 “sage”, *dàrén* 大人 “great man”, and *jié* 傑 “outstanding man, hero”.

In comparison to the passages in the chapters 46 and 47, which have an almost perfectly regular isosyllabic structure, the overall structure of this section is far more complex and irregular – even asymmetric. This can be best seen in

between the two words is not negligible, but even if it were a loan, the syntax would remain far from natural and clear.

⁴³ The constructions *nán/nàn* 難 + Verb can be understood in at least two ways here: first as the very common construction “to be difficult to be V-ed”, and second, as Harbsmeier surprisingly does, as “to raise objections against V-ing”. The latter interpretation is less probable, since the verb *nàn* 難 “to criticise” typically takes nominal objects.

schema 1, which summarises the content of the three parts. The numbers in the tables indicate the number of syllables, the label “1” in parentheses signalizes weakly stressed grammatical words, usually *ér* 而 [*nə] or *zhě* 者[*tA-q].⁴⁴ The numbers in the parentheses followed by a question mark are proposed emendations. The thin lines mark off boundaries of relative heterogeneities – we can see that they combine in intriguing ways. The initial *fú* 夫, relating to the whole para-

| institution | functional definitions | | | violation | convention (+) |
|-------------|------------------------|---|---|-------------|----------------|
| 1+2 | 所以 | 2 | 也 | (2)+4+(1) | ADJ |
| 1+2 | 所以 | 4 | 也 | (1)+5+(1) | ADJ |
| 2 | 所以 | 2 | 也 | (1)+4+(1) | ADJ |
| 2 | 所以 | 2 | 也 | (1)+4+3+(1) | ADJ |
| 2 | 所以 | 2 | 也 | (1)+3+3+(1) | N |
| 2 | 所以 | 2 | 也 | (1)+2+8+(1) | N |

6x

| behavior | Convention (–) |
|-------------------|----------------|
| (1)+4+4 | ADJ |
| 3+3 | ADJ |
| 4 | ADJ |
| 3+3 | ADJ |
| 5+4+ <div>者</div> | ADJ |

5x

| behavior | convention (+) |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| 2 | ADJ |
| 2 | ADJ |
| 2 | ADJ |
| 5(2+3) | ADJ |
| 4 | ADJ |
| 6(>4?) | ADJ |
| 4 | N |
| 4 | N |
| 4 | N |
| 4 | ADJ |
| 5(>4?) | ADJ |
| 3+(1)+3, 3, 5 | N |
| 8, 1+(1)+3+ <div>者</div> | N |
| 3+3+ <div>者</div> | N |

14x

Schema 1

44 With the exception of *jīn yǒu* 今有, unstressedness of which is at issue, but the expression is in any case very formulaic.

graph, is omitted in the schema. Also, it is quite interesting that the chapter touches upon twenty (mistakenly) positive classifications in contrast to merely five (mistakenly) negative classifications. If we take into account that chapter 47 contains critiques of only (mistakenly) positive classifications and that chapter 46 is neatly symmetrical, it becomes obvious that the author predominantly attacks the positive designations for behaviour and people that he himself considers harmful, rather than the negative designations for behaviour and people he considers beneficial.

Chapter 46, “Liùfǎn” 六反

The passage under investigation appears at the beginning of the chapter without any introduction, the whole paragraph closing with a brief summary and explication of the main message.⁴⁵ It accounts for only a small part of the relatively long chapter. Two sections can be distinguished here, II.A and II.B, which are again mutually antithetical, and even antiparallel (i.e. parallel but antithetical) *sensu stricto*, allowing analysis of synonymic and antonymic relationships as presented below.

II.A

The author first provides a description of a certain kind of behaviour and subsequently “objectively” classifies the people who engage in it. In the second part of each line, he complains about the people of his own day referring to such persons in an inappropriate way, opposed to his own classification. In II.A, “objectively” wrong behaviour is depicted as being generally labelled positively:

| | | |
|----------------------|--------|------------|
| 畏死遠 ⁴⁶ 難, | 降北之民也, | 而世尊之曰貴生之士; |
| 學道立方, | 離法之民也, | 而世尊之曰文學之士; |
| 遊居厚養, | 牟食之民也, | 而世尊之曰有能之士; |
| 語曲牟知, | 偽詐之民也, | 而世尊之曰辯智之士; |
| 行劍攻殺, | 暴憊之民也, | 而世尊之曰礪勇之士; |
| 活湧匿姦, | 當死之民也, | 而世尊之曰任譽之士; |
| 此六民者, 世之所譽也。 | | |

⁴⁵ The most important of which is 姦偽無益之民六, 而世譽之如彼; 耕戰有益之民六, 而世毀之如此; 此之謂六反。 “The wicked and false people who are of no benefit are of six kinds but the world praises them as outlined before. The people who engage in agriculture and war and are of benefit are of six kinds but the world speak ill of them as just outlined. These are called the six contradictions.”

⁴⁶ The character *yuǎn/yuàn* 遠 is missing in the *Qióndào* edition; it is supplied here according to the Zhào Yǒngxián’s edition, but Chén (2000: 1001) does not consider it necessary.

Those who fear death and keep far from trouble are the kinds of people who are prone to surrender but the world honours them and calls them “freemen with a high regard for life”. Those who study the Way and establish their specialist methods are the kinds of people who do not keep close to the law but the world honours them and calls them “gentlemen educated in the arts”.

Those who are always on the move and get lavishly entertained are the kinds of people who always look for a free meal, but the world honours them and calls them “freemen of ability”.

Those whose speech is all twisted and have a craving for knowledge are fake and deceitful people but the world honours them and calls them “well-spoken and wise freemen”.

Those who wield the sword and launch murderous attacks are violent swashbucklers,⁴⁷ but the world honours them and calls them “freemen of persevering courage”⁴⁸.

Those who let villains live and hide wicked people are the sorts of people who ought to be put to death, but the world honours them and calls them “men of fame”⁴⁹.

These four kinds of people are the sort that the world praises.

47 The character 傲, featuring in the *Hánfēizǐ jījiě* 韓非子集解 reprinted in the *Zhūzǐ jíchéng* 諸子集成 edition, is normally read *jiǎo* or *jǐ* and is a variant of *jiǎo* 僥 “to have good luck”, or means “fast” respectively according to HYDZD. Neither seems to give a good sense here, although Zhāng Jué 張覺 offers precisely an explanation based on identification of the character as a variant of 僥: if one accepts explanation in HYDZD, it would be possible to consider “to take risk”, which is reflected in Zhāng Jué’s translation. However, it appears to me that the character in question is most probably a variant of 傲 “arrogant”. In the Baxter-Sagart system, the phonophoric of the character *jiǎo/jǐ* 傲 can be reconstructed as *kkew-q and the phonophoric of the character 傲 傲 can be reconstructed as *nggaw (both initial consonants are velars, and both -ew- and -aw- belong to the traditional *xiāo* 宵 rhyme category). Moreover, Chén’s edition has the character 傲 instead, which is clearly a variant of 傲, the same variation occurring in chapter 15.

48 HYDZD gives the meaning “to encourage, to sharpen” for *lián* 礪, and glosses the combination *liányǒng* 礪勇 as *yǐ yǒng zì lì* 以勇自勵 “to encourage oneself thanks to bravery”, citing our text as an example. This could be a parallel derivation to *lǐ* 礪 “whetstone” → “to polish, to train, to cultivate”, since the character 礪 normally stands for the word *lián* “coarse whetstone”. From another point of view, one can also well imagine the semantic extension “to be like a coarse whetstone → to be harsh, to be tough”, and *liányǒng* 礪勇 as a compound. This is supported by the meaning that Wáng Lì et al. 2000 give for this word, citing this passage – *lénglì* 稜利, while one of the meanings of *léng* is glossed as *yánlì* 嚴厲 “severe” in HYDZD. Choosing a different solution, Zhāng Jué 張覺 follows Wáng Xiānshèn’s 王先慎 explanation 《說文》: 礪, 厲石也。凡稜利之義即此字之轉注, 經傳皆以廉為之 “The *Shuōwén* says: *lián* means a coarse whetstone; all [characters] with the meaning of pointedness are ‘mutually commenting’ (*zhuǎnzhù*) variations of this character; in the traditions of the classics they are always represented by the graph 廉”, and interprets it in its figurative sense “principled, upright”. It is worth noting that in pre-imperial texts we regularly find the word “sickle → (or ←) to be sharp, to be prickly” represented by *lián* 廉~鐮, obviously pertaining to the same word family.

49 The precise meaning of *rèn yù* 任譽 is not entirely clear (cf. Zhāng 1993: 962; Chén 2000: 1003). It could also refer to the men who “recommend (*Shuōwén* “任, 保也”; Duàn Yùcái explains that “如今言保舉是也” “it is the same as when contemporary people say *bǎojiǔ*, i.e. to

It is remarkable that on the left side of the equation (marked, respectively, by the “strong” *yě* 也, which implies the real state of things from the viewpoint of the author, and the “weak” *yuē* 曰, which implies merely a state of things as *understood* and *described* by other people) we have a predicative phrase, but on the right side we can see a nominal phrase. Thus, we have to either consider the left side to be nominalised (“[those who]”), as Harbsmeier does in his translation in the *Thesaurus Linguae Sericae*, or to accept the discrepancy and translate in the sense “if someone behaves in such and such way, then he is such and such kind of man”. The equation would then hold between the unexpressed subject (there is after all no third person pronoun in independent clauses in Classical Chinese) and the nominal predicate(s) to the right. In any case, this type of structural asymmetry seems to be rather the norm. The words *mín* 民 “people” and *shì* 士 “freeman, retainer etc.” are clearly construed as synonyms in this particular case (which is confirmed by II.B), differences being neutralized for the moment being.

In the *Qíándào* edition, one formal detail attracts our attention: all the phrases in the section are strictly tetrasyllabic; only the first phrase consists of three syllables. However, in some modern critical editions the character *yuǎn*/*yuàn* 遠 is supplied on the basis of other editions (Zhàng Yǒngxián). It thus seems very probable that at least some of these minor irregularities may have come into existence as corruptions of the text in the process of its transmission. Apart from evident textual differences between the extant versions of the work, its commentators and collators often come up with various suggestions about how to regularize the text which seems corrupted to them, appearing to them to be either incomprehensible or irregular. This fact makes it very difficult to assess the real importance or even relevance of this type of variation.

The classification of the behaviour is effected by nominal predication. The conjunction *ér* 而 then marks off the adversative relationship (which is however mainly inferred from the context, since the meaning of *ér* is very general), and the phrase *shì zūn zhī yuē* 世尊之曰 “the present generation honours them, calling them ...” follows, which is to my knowledge unique in transmitted literature of the period.

II.B

This section is a mirror image of II.A – a good thing is depreciated by most people of these times:

recommend”) and praise (= “defend”?) people”, instead of “the men who rely on their fame”. Chén thinks of a corrupted form of *rèn yì* 任義 “to meet one’s [private] obligations”.

赴險殉誠，死節之民_一，而世少之曰失計之民也；
寡聞從令，全法之民也，而世少之曰樸陋之民也；
力作而食，生利之民也，而世少之曰寡能之民也；
嘉厚純粹，整穀之民也，而世少之曰愚戇之民也；
重命畏事，尊上之民也，而世少之曰怯懦之民也；
挫賊遏姦，明上之民也，而世少之曰諂讒之民也；
此六民者，世之所毀也。

Those who hasten to brook danger and who die for their earnestness are people who are willing to sacrifice their lives for their values, but the world belittles them and calls them “people who do not know to set the right priorities”.

Those who listen to few things and follow orders are people who insure the complete realisation of the law, but the world belittles them and calls them “naive and vulgar people”.

Those who earn their living by strenuous effort are people who create benefits, but the world belittles them and calls them “people of few abilities”.

Those who are generous and pure are decent nice people,⁵⁰ but the world belittles them calling them “stupid and dumb people”.

Those who put great weight on orders and who carry out public business in fear and awe are people who show public respect to their superiors, but the world belittles them calling them “chicken-hearted people”.

Those who attack villains and stop the wicked are people who make their leaders illustrious, but the world belittles them and calls them “fawning and foul-mouthed fellows”.

These six kinds of people are severely criticised by the world.

Formally, the word *shì* 士 turns into *mín* 民, whereby synonymy changes to identity in the two nominal predications. Instead of the phrase *shì zūn zhī yuē* 世尊之曰 we see its antonymic reformulation to *shì shǎo zhī yuē* 世少之曰 “the present world belittles them calling them ...”. At the end of the lines, closing the sentence “the world belittles them calling them ...”, the particle *yě* 也 is added. Again, one detail attracts one’s attention – all the nominal predicates are signalled by the particle *yě* 也, yet in the first line, marked by “_一” above, this particle is absent.

How do these sections actually work rhetorically and how are they structured? What we see here are in fact two alternative classifications of the same behaviour, one of which is construed as the objective truth (linguistically expressed as an ordinary nominal predication with the particle *yě* 也) and the other as a conventional discursive truth based on the prevailing public opinion (lin-

⁵⁰ The character *gǔ* 穀 [*kkok] may stand here for the word *gǔ* “good” (attested in early texts, but also in the self-deprecatative reference of the ruler to himself *bùgǔ* 不穀 “the unworthy one”), or as a loan character for the word *què* 慤 “honest” [*kkhrok] (the two characters share the phonophoric). Taking the antiparallelism with IL.B1 (*wěizhà* 偽詐 “cheating”) into account, one tends to accept the latter explanation. See Zhāng 1993: 962 and Chén 2000: 1004.

guistically expressed by the equational verb *yuē* 曰). Moreover, these two alternatives are implicitly opposed to each other – the adversative, but slightly more concessional meaning of the conjunction *ér* 而 is again mostly inferred from the context.

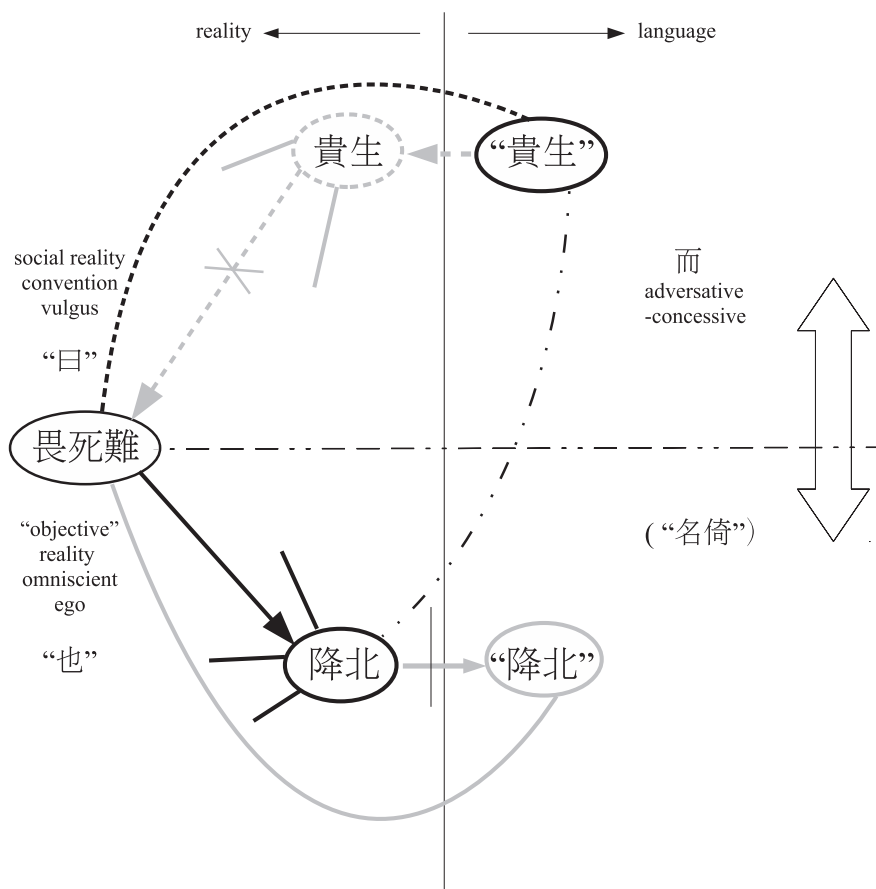
The argumentation is in part based on inferences:

A is B, but it is called C {though it is not C} →

A is {and therefore is to be called} B, but it is called C {though it is not C} →

A is {and therefore is to be called {and *eo ipso* can be called}} B, but it is {and obviously can be} called C {though it is not C}.

The emerging argumentative strategy is depicted in schema 2:



Schema 2

The black lines represent those relationships that are overtly expressed in the text, the grey lines represent implications. The solid lines mark ontologically and epistemologically “strong” relationships, i.e. those construed by the author as objective reality, the dashed lines represent the sphere of conventional subjective truths. Thus, in this example, the behaviour *wèi sǐ yuàn nán* 畏死遠難 “to fear death and to keep far away from hardship” is classified as an instance of *xiángběi* 降北 “to surrender, to run away from a battle”; implicitly it should be called “*xiángběi* 降北”, but (*ér* 而) it is conventionally called “*guì shēng* 貴生” and, by implication, for most people it really is an instance of *guì shēng* 貴生 “to value one’s life”, though this is, again, signalled as wrong via implication.⁵¹

As far as more hidden heterogeneities are concerned, these can be discovered on the level of attributes of the various *mín* or *shì*, which are consistently marked by the genitive particle *zhī* 之. Upon closer examination, we find out that all of them are either verb-object phrases or adjectival phrases, both predicative in principle – except for *wénxué* 文學 “literary studies”, where predication is hard to imagine,⁵² and *dāng sǐ* 當死 “should die”, which is a construction of a modal and a full verb and the only modal, non-descriptive attribute; it is a very conspicuous irregularity.⁵³

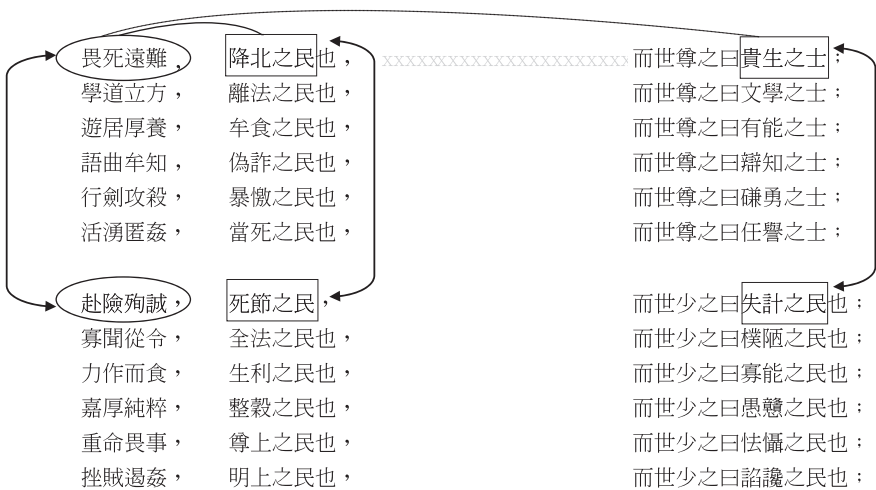
Schema 3 shows the relationships in the passage. Horizontally, we can see the two alternative classifications, the different truth values of which are obvious. There is clearly a discrepancy between them, although we usually cannot call this antonymy proper; it is, technically speaking, simply non-equivalence.⁵⁴ On the

51 The conventional designations are thus not correct, but “slanted”: the fitting expression *míng yǐ* 名倚 “designations go slant” is attested in *Hánfēizǐ* 8.3.1.

52 We encounter a large number of lexically nominal units used as predicates denoting a process or an action, but *wénxué* does not occur in this function and both its formal and semantic structures make this possibility somewhat improbable. Nor does it seem to be probable that it is a disyllabic adjective. Of course, there is always the possibility that it is a Verb-Object structure as well with the meaning “to pattern the learning”. Nonetheless, neither the way the expression is employed in the *Hánfēizǐ* and in other comparable works of the period, nor commentaries and modern translations (both into Modern Chinese and Western languages) of the text indicate that this is the case.

53 It may be argued that the modal verb *dāng* 當 “must, to have to” probably arose from the full verb *dāng* 當 “to correspond”, and that, originally, *dāng sǐ* 當死 was a usual Verb-Object construction. But the grammaticalisation process was clearly perfectly completed by the Warring States period, and it is thus questionable whether speakers of Classical Chinese would be able to recognise the etymology of the construction and see the historical parallelism with the other Verb-Object constructions in the stanza.

54 Thus we have the following antithetical pairs (see below for glosses of the expressions): 降北 ≈ 貴生, 離法 ≈ 文學, 牟食 ≈ 有能, 偽詐 ≈ 辯智, 暴傲 ≈ 礪勇, 當死 ≈ 任譽; 死節 ≈ 失計, 全法 ≈ 樸陋, 生利 ≈ 寡能, 整穀 ≈ 愚戇, 尊上 ≈ 怯懼, 明上 ≈ 諂讒.



Schema 3

other hand, the antonymy in the vertical dimension seems to be beyond dispute, in spite of the varying degree of quality of this antonymy:

We thus get the following antonymic relationships,⁵⁵ which can among others help us to correctly understand some less common terms, such as *shī jì* 失計 “to fail in prudence”, *zhěnggǔ* 整穀 “to be good and honest” or *liányǒng* 礪勇 “to be brave”:

| | |
|--|--|
| <i>xiángběi</i> 降北 “to surrender and run away” | ≈ <i>sǐ jié</i> 死節 “to die for one’s principles” |
| <i>lí fǎ</i> 離法 “to diverge from the law” | ≈ <i>quán fǎ</i> 全法 “to perfectly observe the law” |
| <i>móu shí</i> 牟食 “to seek for [easy] food” | ≈ <i>shēng lì</i> 生利 “to produce profit” |
| <i>wěizhà</i> 偽詐 “to cheat” | ≈ <i>zhěngguè</i> 整穀 “to be good and honest” |
| <i>bào’ào</i> 暴傲 “to be arrogant” | ≈ <i>zūn shàng</i> 尊上 “to respect the superiors” |
| <i>dāng sǐ</i> 當死 “should die” | ≈ <i>míng shàng</i> 明上 “to inform the superiors” |

⁵⁵ There are detailed monograph-length studies of the lexicon of the *Hánfēizǐ*, such as Zhào 2004 or Wèi 1995, who investigate, among other features, the antonymic relationships in the text. However, none of them addresses the structures under investigation, probably because the particular expressions are not words but collocations.

guì shēng 貴生 “to value one’s life”

wénxué 文學 “literary studies”

yǒu néng 有能 “to have abilities”

biànzhi 辯智 “to be clever”

liányǒng 謙勇 “to be brave”

rènyù 任譽 “to rely on one’s fame (?)”

≈ *shī jì* 失計 “to fail in prudence”

≈ *pǔlòu* 樸陋 “to be simply-minded”

≈ *guǎ néng* 寡能 “to have few abilities”

≈ *yúgàng* 愚戇 “to be stupid”

≈ *qièshè* 怯懾 “to be cowardly”

≈ *chǎnchán* 諂讒 “to flatter and to slander”

Among these, the pairs 暴傲 ≈ 尊上, 當死 ≈ 明上, and 貴生 ≈ 失計 are not especially good antonyms, lacking basic symmetry; as discussed above, the meaning of 任譽 is unclear and translation(s) only tentative.

What is more, the “definienda” stand in the same relationship towards each other:

wèi sǐ yuǎn nàn 畏死遠難 “to fear death and keep far away from hardship” ≈ *fù xiǎn xùn chéng* 赴險殉誠 “to hasten to brook danger and die for earnestness”

xué dào lì fāng 學道立方 “to study the Way and establish specialist methods” ≈ *guǎ wén cóng lìng* 寡聞從令 “to listen to few things and follow orders”

yóu jū hòu yǎng 遊居厚養 “to be always on the move and get lavishly entertained” ≈ *lì zuò ér shí* 力作而食 “to earn one’s living by strenuous effort and create benefits”

yǔ qū móu zhī 語曲牟知 “to have twisted speech and craving for knowledge” ≈ *jiā hòu chúncuì* 嘉厚純粹 “to be generous and pure and decent nice people”

xíng jiàn gōng shā 行劍攻殺 “to wield the sword and launch murderous attacks” ≈ *zhòng mìng wèi shì* 重命畏事 “to respect orders and carry out public business in fear and awe”

huó zéi nì jiān 活賊匿姦 “villains live and hide wicked people” ≈ *cuò zéi è jiān* 挫賊遏姦 “to attack villains and stop the wicked”

On the basis of the logical relationships in the matrix (A, B, and C constitute lines in II.A, D, E, and F constitute the antiparallel lines in II.B):

A B也, 而曰C

D E也, 而曰F

which can be formalized as $A \subset B$, $A \neq C$, $D \subset E$, $D \neq F$, $D = \neg A$, $E = \neg B$, $F = \neg C$ (and, reflexively, $A = \neg D$, $B = \neg E$, $C = \neg F$), it would be possible to trace some other connections, which I do not elaborate here.

The chapter 47, “Bāshuō” 八說

The passage at issue constitutes only a brief introductory paragraph to a relatively extensive chapter. There is no introduction, the paragraph starts *in medias res*, and ends, as is the rule, with a short summary and explanation of the basic principles exposed in the chapter.⁵⁶ In principle, the section III resembles II.A, evaluating two alternative categorizations, but differs from it in rhetorical strategy to a certain extent.

III

The author provides description of a certain type of behaviour, expressed by a clause, and draws our attention to the fact that it is commonly called by lexically positive designations in the first step. Only in the second step, the author explains the consequences of such behaviour and implicitly suggests its recategorization:

| | |
|-------|-------|
| 為故人行私 | 謂之不棄， |
| 以公財分施 | 謂之仁人， |
| 輕祿重身 | 謂之君子， |
| 枉法曲親 | 謂之有行， |
| 棄官寵交 | 謂之有俠， |
| 離世遁上 | 謂之高傲， |
| 交爭逆令 | 謂之剛材， |
| 行惠取眾 | 謂之得民。 |

Doing old friends personal favours is called “not abandoning them”.

Taking public resources and doling them out to the people is called “being kind to people”.

Taking stipends lightly and personal culture seriously is called “being a gentleman”.

Perverting the law and showing special consideration for blood relatives is called “having proper demeanour”.

Disregarding official duties and showing special favour to acquaintances is called “having a knightly spirit”.

Deviating from general opinion and hiding from the authorities is called “having a lofty and haughty spirit”.

Being cantankerous and going against orders is called “being tough and talented”.

Practising generosity and wooing the allegiance of the masses is called “gaining the support of the masses”.

56 此八者匹夫之私譽，人主之大敗也。反此八者，匹夫之私毀，人主之公利也。人主不察社稷之利害，而用匹夫之私譽，索國之無危亂，不可得矣。

These eight are the selfish praises of the ordinary man, and they lead to failure for the ruler of men. The opposite of these eight are selfishly criticised by the ordinary man but they are of public benefit for the ruler. If the ruler does not investigate the harm and benefit to the nation but acts according to the selfish praise from the ordinary people then if he is aiming for the state being without danger and political turmoil that is an impossible aim.

| | |
|-----|-------|
| 不棄者 | 吏有姦也， |
| 仁人者 | 公財損也， |
| 君子者 | 民難使也， |
| 有行者 | 法制毀也， |
| 有俠者 | 官職曠也， |
| 高傲者 | 民不事也， |
| 剛材者 | 令不行也， |
| 得民者 | 君上孤也。 |

But if one is not abandoning old friends, then the executive officials will be wicked. If one treats others humanely, public resources will get depleted.

If one is “a gentleman”, then the people are hard to deploy.

If one has “proper demeanour”, then the legal system will be destroyed.

If one has “a knightly spirit”, then official duties will be carried out in a lax way.

If one is “lofty and haughty in spirit”, then the people will not do their official work.

If one is “tough and talented”, then one’s orders will not be carried out.

If one “gains the support of the people”, the ruler above is isolated.

If we again look for heterogeneities, we find that the terms *rén rén* 仁人 and *jūnzǐ* 君子 are (normally) nouns with the meaning “humane man” and “gentleman” respectively, whereas the items in the remaining parallel positions are adjectives or verbal phrases. One could, on the basis of analogy, consider the possibility of interpreting the two apparently nominal phrases verbally as Verb-Object and denominal verb respectively (see C. Harbsmeier’s translation in the *Thesaurus Linguae Sericae*, which follows this logic), which would be acceptable, but it does not seem to be necessary with regard to other similar inconsistencies in the text. The question is in any case open, and, in fact, cannot be decided with certainty in principle.

Formally, we have here clear equivalences of predicative phrases, and, semantically speaking, of the whole facts or situations. In analogy with chapter 46 (“*Liǔfǎn*”), there is the weak equivalence expressed by *wèi zhī* 謂之 “they call it”, whose subject is unspecified (implicitly: “people”), and the strong equivalence expressed by the particle *yě* 也 (nominal predication with an explicative overtone). The pronoun *zhě* 者 does not stand here for the subject of an embedded clause but for the fact expressed by the predicative phrase itself, or possibly even for the expression itself (i.e. as quotational *zhě* 者 “the so called ...”). Thus we get the meaning “to do this and this [in fact] means to do this and this”, the overall “nominal” conceptualisation of clauses in the role of the subject and predicate of a nominal sentence being manifested through the English infinitives in the translation. Unlike in chapter 46, the implicitly mistaken classification of the behaviour by people is adduced first, and the “objective” assessment follows only later as a kind of correction. The author moreover does not proceed line by line with his corrections, but waits to provide all of the corrections together in the

second block. This structural difference from chapter 46 has the effect of a relatively more pronounced surprise. In comparison with chapter 46, where each correction is provided immediately, this creates a sustained structural tension, which is resolved only with the onset of the second block. From another point view, what we have here are eight classifications, always with a digression, which constitutes a kind of pivot in the discourse. Formally, the only irregularities are the first two objects classified, consisting of five syllables instead of four. This can be explained by the fact that both initial words are prepositions, i.e. weakly stressed grammatical words.⁵⁷

Inventory of terms glossed in the three chapters

As far as the semantics of the given terms is concerned, it is possible to roughly categorize the expressions into several broadly conceived groups, which reveal the most important domains of the author's interests and preoccupations, and his attitudes towards them. In the respective groups, the symbols + and – mark the position of the words with regard to the category (presence vs. absence of the defining features, conformity vs. lack of conformity etc.).

Rúfū-like or “Confucian” features (*nota bene* all with a clearly negative connotation for Hān Fēi):

xián 賢 “to be able and virtuous”, *zhōng* 忠 “to be loyal”, *zhèng* 正 “to be right”, *lián* 廉 “to be honest”, *rén* 仁 “to be humane”, *zhǎngzhě* 長者 “(older) distinguished citizen”, *shītú* 師徒 “followers of a master”, *shèng* 聖 “sage”, *wénxué* 文學 “literary studies”, *rénrén* 仁人 “humane man, man of humanness”, *jūnzǐ* 君子 “gentleman”, *yǒu xìng* 有行 “to show correct behaviour”, *dé mín* 得民 “to win people's favour”, *rèn yù* 任譽 “to rely on one's fame (?)”

Bravery:

lièshì 烈士 “hero” (+), *yǒngfū* 勇夫 “brave man” (+), *qiè* 怯 “to be timid” (–), *yǒng* 勇 “to be brave” (+), *jié* 傑 “an outstanding man” (+), *xiángběi* 降北 “to run away

⁵⁷ The prepositions of Classical Chinese do have their origins in the corresponding verbs and are often called “co-verbs” accordingly. Also, we naturally have little information about the phonological stress in this dead written language. However, grammatical words in general tend to become unstressed, at least under usual circumstances. This is after all one of the many facets of the process of grammaticalisation, which regularly affects grammatical words even in languages “without coevolution of form and meaning” (Bisang 2004; Heine and Reh 1984). Modern Chinese is an excellent laboratory of shifts in prosodical features of words undergoing grammaticalisation, which are still underresearched to a large extent.

from a battle” (–), *yǒu xiá* 有俠 “to have a knightly spirit” (+), *liányǒng* 驍勇 “to be courageous” (+), *qièshè* 怯懦 “to be cowardly” (–)

Intelligence:

yú 愚 “to be stupid” (–), *lòu* 陋 “to be ignorant” (–), *yǒusī* 有思 “[someone with] deep thoughts” (+), *jízhi* 疾智 “to be quick-witted” (+), *biànzhi* 辯智 “to be clever” (+), *pǔlòu* 樸陋 “to be simply-minded” (–), *yúgàng* 愚戇 “to be stupid” (–)

Elevated spirit:

gāo 高 “to be elevated” (+), *gāoào* 高傲 “to be elevated and proud” (+), *jù* 戇 “to be vulgar” (?; –)

Competence:

bùxiào 不肖 “to be incompetent” (–), *yǒu néng* 有能 “to have abilities” (+), *guǎ néng* 寡能 “to have few abilities” (–), *gāngcái* 剛材 “to be tough and talented” (+)

Legality:

lí fǎ 離法 “to diverge from the law” (–), *quán fǎ* 全法 “to fully observe the law” (+)

Deception:

wěizhà 偽詐 “to cheat” (+), *chǎnchán* 諂讒 “to flatter and to slander” (+)

Miscellaneous, general broad terms (generally considered positive/negative):

zhòng 重 “to be serious” (pos), *yuàn* 愿 “to be honest” (pos), *dāng sǐ* 當死 “should die” (neg⁵⁸), *sǐ jié* 死節 “to die for one’s principles” (pos), *shēng lì* 生利 “to produce profit” (pos), *guì shēng* 貴生 “to value one’s life” (pos), *shī jì* 失計 “to fail in prudence” (neg), *zhěng què* 整穀 “to be good and honest” (pos), *zūn shàng* 尊上 “to show respect to the superiors” (pos), *míng shàng* 明上 “to inform the superiors” (pos)

Miscellaneous, special terms and collocations, clearly all meant in a negative way by Hán Fēi:

qí 齊 “to be egalitarian”, *móu shí* 牟食 “to seek for [easy] food”, *bàoào* 暴傲 “to be arrogant”, *bù qì* 不棄 “to not abandon [one’s old friends]”

Especially *qí* 齊 “egalitarian” and *bù qì* 不棄 “to not leave (one’s friends) in the lurch” are designations for common concepts, which are nonetheless difficult to find elsewhere in the corpus of the transmitted Warring States literature; both *qí*

⁵⁸ As mentioned above, this is the only modally deontic, non-descriptive expression in the entire inventory.

and *qì* are very frequent, but with different, less specialised meanings; particularly *qí* is surprising here in this sense.⁵⁹

Connotations and their mismatches

One of the issues to be properly investigated is the “lexical”, conventional connotations of the expressions found in the line initial positions of the argument (i.e. those depicting a certain kind of behaviour). They can, in principle, be equivocal because they tend to be arranged as objective analytic descriptions, whereas the other positions in the argument are systematically construed clearly as positive or negative. Despite the seemingly rational objectivity, the author presents the type of behaviour with an obvious value-judgement, a “spin”, which is encoded in the structure of the discourse. However, the definition of the behaviour may be linguistically expressed by lexical units with different connotative values in the view of the majority of the speech community. One can call these overtones lexical connotations, in contrast to Hán Fēi’s contextual connotations. I try tentatively to assess these lexical values on intuitive grounds for our present purposes, nonetheless, they are always open to discussion and in any case await a deeper survey:

In I.B:⁶⁰ (for the author clearly +): all conventionally +
dūnquè chúnxìn, yòngxīn qiè yán 惇慤純信，用心怯言 “to be generous and diligent, pure and reliable, to give one’s very best and reticent in speaking up”
shǒu fǎ gù, tīng lìng shěn 守法固，聽令審 “to be staunch in upholding the law and meticulous in obeying ordinances”
jìng shàng wèi zuì 敬上畏罪 “to respect their superiors and fear crime”
yán shíjié, xíng zhòngshì 言時節，行中適 “to speak timely and act appropriately”
wú èrxīn sīxué, tīng lì cóng jiào 無二心私學，聽吏從教 “to be without divided allegiances and selfish intellectual pursuits but listen to minor officials and follow their instructions”

In I.C (for the author clearly –):

(0) *nán zhì* 難致 “to be difficult to be summoned to high office”

⁵⁹ *Qí* in this meaning is attested in the *Xúnzǐ* (17.12.1), where it applies to the teachings of Mò Dí 墨翟; Knoblock translates it as “uniformity”, which can work for the given context, but here it is clearly extended somewhat further.

⁶⁰ The situation in I.A has been already treated separately in connection with the structure of the paragraph.

- (0) *nán yǔ* 難予 “to be difficult to be given an official gift”
 (0/–) *nán jìn* 難禁 “to be difficult to be prohibited to do something”
 (–) *yǒu lìng bù tīngcóng* 有令不聽從 “to not obey given ordinances”
 (–) *wú lì yú shàng* 無利於上 “to be of no benefit to the leadership”
 (+) *shǎo yù kuānhuì xíng dé* 少欲寬惠行德 “to have few desires, be charitable and magnanimous in action”
 (0/+) *zhòng hòu zì zūn* 重厚自尊 “to have great influence and high self-esteem”
 (0) *sī xué chéng qún* 私學成群 “to engage in selfish private study and form gangs”
 (+) *xiánjìng ānjū* 閑靜安居 “to relax and dwell in peace”
 (–) *sǔn rén zhú lì* 損仁逐利 “to pursue profit at the expense of kindness”
 (–) *xiǎnzào tiāo fǎnfū* 險躁佻反覆 “to be a garrulous busybody, frivolous and fickle”
 (+) *xiān wèi rén ér hòu zì wèi, lèi míng hào, yán fàn ài tiān xià* 先為人而後自為，類名號，言汎愛天下 “to first act for others in order thereafter to act in one’s own interest, to regard all ranks as equal, to propose that one should universally love all in the world”
 (0/–) *yán dà běn, chēng ér bù kě yòng, xíng ér guāi yú shì* 言大本稱而不可用，行而乖於世 “to speak up on great fundamental matters, to get praised but not to be able to be used, to act counter to one’s times”
 (0) *jiàn juélù, bù náo shàng* 賤爵祿，不撓上 “to regard ranks and stipends as worthless and not bend before the leadership”

In II.A (for the author clearly –):

- (0/–) *wèi sǐ yuǎn nán* 畏死遠難 “to fear death and keep far away from hardship”
 (+) *xué dào lì fāng* 學道立方 “to study the Way and establish specialist methods”
 (0) *yóu jū hòu yǎng* 遊居厚養 “to be always on the move and get lavishly entertained”
 (0/–) *yǔ qū móu zhī* 語曲牟知 “to have twisted speech and craving for knowledge”
 (0) *xíng jiàn gōng shā* 行劍攻殺 “to wield the sword and launch murderous attacks”
 (–) *huó zéi nì jiān* 活賊匿姦 “to keep villains live and hide wicked people”

In II.B (for the author clearly +):

- (+) *fù xiǎn xùn chéng* 赴險殉誠 “to hasten to brook danger and die for earnestness”
 (0) *guǎ wén cóng lìng* 寡聞從令 “to listen to few things and follow orders”
 (0) *lì zuò ér shí* 力作而食 “to earn one’s living by strenuous effort and create benefits”

(+) *jiā hòu chúncuì* 嘉厚純粹 “to be generous and pure”

(+) *zhòng mìng wèi shì* 重命畏事 “to respect orders and carry out public business in fear and awe”

(+) *cuò zéi è jiān* 挫賊遏姦 “to attack villains and stop the wicked”

In III (for the author clearly –):

(0) *wèi gùrén xíng sī* 為故人行私 “to do old friends personal favours”

(0) *yǐ gōngcái fēnshī* 以公財分施 “to take public resources and dole them out to the people”

(0) *qīng lù zhòng shēn* 輕祿重身 “to take stipends lightly and personal culture seriously”

(0/–) *wǎng fǎ qū qīn* 枉法曲親 “to pervert the law and show special consideration for blood relatives”

(0/–) *qì guān chǒng jiāo* 棄官寵交 “to disregard official duties and show special favour to acquaintances”

(0/–) *lí shì dùn shàng* 離世遁上 “to deviate from general opinion and hide from the authorities”

(–) *jiāo zhēng nì lìng* 交爭逆令 “to be cantankerous and go against orders”

(+) *xíng huì qǔ zhòng* 行惠取眾 “to practise generosity and woo the allegiance of the masses”

We would expect the formulations to be either lexically neutral or to conform to the structurally imposed “spin”. However, this is not always the case. There are collocations with the opposite sign to that which predominates in the rest of the paragraph, i.e. *shǎo yù kuānhuì xíng dé* 少欲寬惠行德 “to have few desires, be charitable and magnanimous in action”, *xiánjìng ānjū* 閑靜安居 “to relax and dwell in peace”, *xué dào lì fāng* 學道立方 “to study the Way and establish specialist methods”, *zhòng hòu zì zūn* 重厚自尊 “to have great influence and high self-esteem”, *xiān wèi rén ér hòu zì wèi, lèi míng hào, yán fān ài tiānxià* 先為人而後自為, 類名號, 言汎愛天下 “to first act for others in order thereafter to act in one’s own interest, to regard all ranks as equal, to propose that one should universally love all in the world”, and *xíng huì qǔ zhòng* 行惠取眾 “to practise generosity and woo the allegiance of the masses”, and these are to be paid extra attention, as they represent rather unexpected formulations. The author, although presenting the reader with a supposedly “objective” description of a situation which is only miscategorised by the people of the times, employs a phrase that *lexically* presents the opposite value-judgement. These are, in fact, precisely those cases in which the most radical differences in the worldview of the author and the “people of his time” are displayed. In other words, this is not miscategorization – these approaches and the words capturing them simply have radically

different connotations for Hán Fēi. Moreover, we can see that these are always formulations that are positive for the people but negative for the author, never vice versa. Indeed, he feels very uncomfortable with the fact that the world generally extols frugality, generosity, calmness and peace, self-respect, altruism, contempt for fame, or loving care equally for the whole world. These attitudes are well known from the text, but here they are made manifest at the deeper, structural level.

3 Conclusion

Upon investigating the text of the selected passages more closely, we discover that they are not unique only because they deploy a special rhetorical strategy that is uncommon in other texts of the era, but also because they demonstrate the highly sophisticated and structurally elaborate character of the text. The dense formal and semantic relationships between the elements of the text and the skilful linguistic rendering point to very careful composition. Under these circumstances, it is at issue whether such a text could ever have been conceived orally, with the intention to be recited to the public. It would surely be comprehensible for listeners, but a larger part of its richness and compelling force would probably be lost.

From the formal point view it is noticeable how rhetorical devices and structural patterns tend to undergo minor changes from paragraph to paragraph, and how striking this is because trivial irregularities emerge in the transmitted text, such as missing or added function words, and missing syllables violating the rhythm. Given the textual history of the *Hánfēizǐ*, one can think about corruptions of the text in the process of transmission as the main reason for at least some of them. The same is ultimately true of deeper-level heterogeneities, such as non-parallel word class affiliation, where, nevertheless, the influence of transmission is much weaker and the variation thus more authentic.

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